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letters from the dorm

A small idea makes big impact

The viral Instagram egg has been used in a good way - to put the spotlight on mental health issues ignored by society



Tacye Hong, University of Cambridge, Britain

Remember the egg photo on Instagram that beat Kylie Jenner's post as the most-liked picture of all time? Jenner's announcement of the birth of her baby daughter from February 6, 2018 had gained 18 million likes before being dethroned by the stock photo. It currently has 52.7 million likes.

What is so special about this egg that it's still making the news? The Instagram account has, since surpassing Jenner, posted several images of the egg, each showing larger cracks on the shell than before. With such a build-up of suspense, many speculated about what could be inside, and many tried to take credit for the stunt. After all, this kind of media attention could generate millions of dollars for a brand.

It was soon revealed that the egg had partnered with Hulu, a popular streaming service in the United States. During this month's Super Bowl, a 30-second advert featured the egg

which had started to crack, with the caption: "The pressure of social media is getting to me." It then encouraged viewers to talk to someone if they were also struggling. So, all the hype was about a mental health campaign.

I was slightly disappointed at first, even though I did not know what to expect. However, I am now very satisfied with what it turned out to be. Even if this might not be the creators' idea from the get-go, I am happy that Hulu is using the internet to highlight an important message.

People who suffer from a mental illness face a lot of discrimination in their lives. So, any campaign that aims to help sufferers and puts the spotlight on the condition has to be good for society.

Every year since 2011, Canadian telecoms company Bell Canada has dedicated a "Bell Let's Talk Day", hoping to destigmatise mental health and encourage conversation

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So far the egg has racked up some 52 million likes

about the topic. On this day, for every call or text using Bell services, as well as a mention and view of the campaign video, Bell Canada donates five Canadian cents (30 Hong Kong cents) towards mental health initiatives in Canada. This has led to more than C\$100 billion being donated.

Whenever I am stressed and my mum is not immediately available, I watch YouTuber Anna Akana, who makes short sketches about self-love, overthinking, and many other relatable topics. These easily accessible videos serve as therapy sessions. In fact, I believe that everyone should watch these videos to learn more about mental health problems and how to be supportive towards mental health patients.

While the Instagram egg might claim to be negatively affected by social media, I am hopeful that these social media campaigns can have a positive impact on mental health issues. After all, when there are apps that help manage our stress and anxiety levels, it seems that technology should also be able to help fix the problems it created.

'Online scalpers' cheat mainland students

It has been a struggle for many mainland students to reunite with their families in their hometowns for this year's Lunar New Year.

China Railway's official booking website, 12306.cn, was not able to handle the soaring demand for train tickets during the week-long break. So some people used third-party online platforms, or "ticket-snatching apps", to book their tickets.

Users of such plug-ins need to pay extra to cut ahead of others. They are also encouraged to buy "enhanced packages" that supposedly increase their chances of getting a ticket through advanced technology.

However, the apps don't guarantee users will get a ticket. Many people have criticised these "online scalpers", saying that action should be taken against them.

Last month, Lv Weirong, an electrical engineering student from the South China University of Technology, in Guangdong

province, tried to buy a ticket using the Zhixing app but failed.

"I enhanced my packages to the VIP level, but it still didn't work. They're like scalpers!" she complained. "So I had to find a real-life scalper and pay him 369 yuan [HK\$427]. The original price is 219 yuan."

Gu Xiaoyu is a second year student at the South China Agricultural University, also in Guangdong province. Gu said she has used "unofficial" booking sites five times over the past two years but was successful only twice. She said the apps are "unfair".

This year, she went back to 12306.cn, which features a new technology allocating

I enhanced my packages to the VIP level, but it still didn't work. They're scalpers!

cancelled tickets automatically to buyers on the waiting list who had already made advanced payments.

Lin Xuan, a fresh graduate from Sun Yat-sen University, in Guangdong province, used three enhanced packages this year to buy a ticket home. Six months ago, she was able to buy return tickets reserved for students, but now she has to rely on third-party apps.

"They worked. After I place an order, I can just leave the platform alone because the app will buy me the ticket automatically. But I have to do it myself on 12306, not to mention that the tickets are very likely to sell out in a wink," she said. "Everyone is busy now. I'd like to save some time. And until the railway expands its limited capacity, I'll have to count on these apps."

But she said she was concerned about the users' personal information being collected by these ticket-snatching apps. "Protect your



Hundreds of millions of people travelled across the country for family reunions during the Spring Festival. Photo: AFP

privacy and take action. That's all I ask of them," she said.

Liang Xinlu, Sun Yat-sen University



Modern China